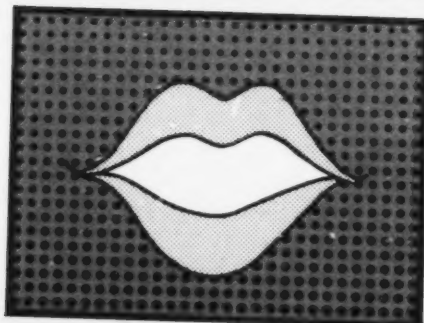
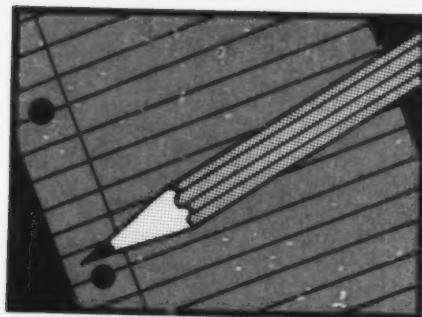
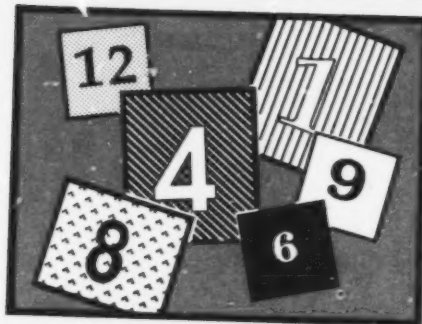
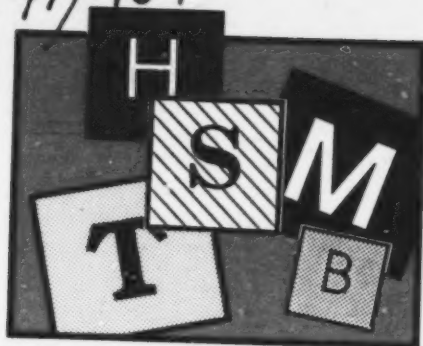


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Learning Disability: Not Just a Problem Children Outgrow

*The President's
Committee
on Employment
of People
With Disabilities*

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January 1, 1989

Colin's Own Story



Colin Corbett Ruffner works as a regional sales representative for a large company in Northern Virginia. In this story, he recollects his experience as a child growing up with a learning disability to give us a glimpse we don't often see of the human being who is behind all of the statistics;

I must first state that I am not an expert on learning disability. I have had only one contact with it and that's with myself. So my reasons may not apply to everyone, and my story may not be the same in that light.

I have had what I consider a pretty hard school life so far. I can't honestly say that I've had a whole lot of fun. I blame a lot of things. First off, in the late seventies, it became all right for all types of people, groups, and so on to come out of the "closet." But during the most important years of my school life, 1966 to 1977, it was not all right to be different. I could not read or write in the fifth grade. I was always in trouble. The schools just plain blamed me, and, of course, my folks. But my mother and dad supported me because they knew I was getting the shaft.

My parents went to meeting after meeting looking for help with all sorts of "pros". Always the same answer: "Colin has just a few problems, nothing that a good doctor can't fix."

Well, during all of this time, I felt like hell. They-meaning the schools-didn't

want me in their classes because they didn't have enough time for me. The old - "Why worry about him when little Jack and Ann are doing so well?"

Well, to make myself feel like someone, I had to pick a role, with a make-believe world. I made myself into the meanest, baddest little fifth grader you've ever seen. And it went on for a number of years, until it got so that even I believed it. Of course, this led to getting into trouble with school people and even with the police. The midnight knock on the front door.

With all this, I was in and out of just about every "special" school around. And finally I was back in public school. Which only meant more trouble and, of course, a very big nasty reputation which goes along with all of this.

Then I took the big step and quit school. I refused to go to another "special" school, and I refused to beg my way back into the public schools. Now, I'm between schools or "lost in the cracks".

The only other thing that I can say about all of this is that I hope with the new understanding and point of view that people have of learning disability today, and with the new tolerance of people who aren't like everyone else, that the Billys, Marys, Tommys and Sues, and their parents won't have to go through the nightmare that myself and my parents have been through.
-Colin Corbett Ruffner



Virginia

*As I walk these streets with the cold
Virginia rain
pouring down
all I can think of is
how the years have gone
taking our love with them -
Our love has fallen
like the first of summer's rays.
No longer do I feel you beside me,
to help me through in
everything I do.
I wonder where our love
has flown
and if I'll ever be the man
I tried to be.
As my tears start to flow,
I wonder why you ran away
and if you'll ever
come back to stay.*



Acceptance

*Sometimes silence says it all
and words left hanging
never fall
But you could turn my night
into day
You could say one word and,
we could be together
like we should be.*

Poetry by Colin Corbett Ruffner

Learning Disabled Adults Face the World of Work

Adults with learning disabilities frequently have problems finding and keeping jobs. Because the field of learning disabilities is so new, exact statistics are hard to locate. But according to a survey of 567 adults with learning disabilities conducted by Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities, 210 were unemployed.¹ This is one of many indications that unemployment among this population is significantly higher than average. Adults with learning disabilities face prejudices in getting hired and their handicaps may make many types of work hard for them. Despite the problems, many adults with LD make strong contributions to society. For example, two athletes who

are champions in the Olympics have spoken publicly about their dyslexia. Bruce Jenner won at the Decathlon and Greg Louganis won in the diving competition. Cher, an actress and entertainer, starred in *Mask* and has spoken about her severe difficulties with learning disabilities. Strong evidence exists that many geniuses of the past were learning disabled. Thomas Edison was thrown out of school and educated by his mother. Albert Einstein flunked math, leading his teacher to believe that he was retarded. Leonardo Da Vinci's manuscripts have many reversals which he claimed were a secret code. But experts have commented that there are reversals within the reversals. Ten royal tutors tried without success to teach



Hans Christian Anderson to read. He dictated his stories to a scribe.

Yet society places many barriers between the adult with a learning disability and success in employment. For example, the late Dian Ridenour, former director of Time Out to Enjoy, a self-help network of adults with LD, explained what happened when she applied for social work jobs:

"Because I am so competent, my resume is pulled every time," she stated. "But as soon as they find out I can't read or write, they don't give me the job. When I offer them alternatives, they don't believe me.

"At one interview, they told me, 'Well, you have to fill out charts.'"

"I said, 'I can sit down with a ward clerk and dictate what they need on the charts very rapidly, and the chart can go with the patient.'"

"They told me I might not be able to find a ward clerk.

"In that case," I countered, 'I could go with the patient and talk to the staff and it would eventually be placed on the chart.'

"They told me that was too time-consuming and that I might not be able to find someone to talk to when I went up with the patient.

"I offered to put it on a tape recorder and even offered to buy my own. Still they showed me the door."

The term "learning disability" has been used to describe a variety of problems in acquiring, storing, and/or retrieving information. According to the U.S. Department of Education, a learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language in the presence of normal or above average intelligence. A learning disability is not mental

retardation or an emotional problem.

Learning disabled people have perceptual problems-trouble taking information in through their senses and/or processing that information for the performance of perceptual-motor tasks. Some LD adults have problems primarily with visual processing and others have more trouble with auditory processing. Others have equal difficulty with both. Many LD adults have apraxia, where the brain has trouble telling the body what to do. Others have problems with directionality, telling left from right and learning how to get to a new place.

*"A learning disability
is not mental
retardation or an
emotional problem"*

Hal Ewoldt described how his problems affected him when he was a battery salesman:

"I had to run a cash register and it's hard for me to push buttons and make change. I couldn't even run the adding machine. I had a rough time.

"Let's say I had to take a battery out of a car and put a new one in. I had to use all the different tools to get the darned battery out. Not to spill acid on the car, on myself, and on the customer was difficult. Then I had to get the new battery. off the shelf. I had to climb up a step ladder. Let's say the numbers were US2PCA53. I'd often reverse the numbers and take the wrong one off the shelf. It wouldn't even fit the car. And it was really embarrassing having the customer waiting and waiting for me to put his battery in.

"Changing a battery took a lot of eye-hand coordination, to get it to fit in there right, to get the positive cable onto the positive stub, to get the negative cable hooked up to the negative stub.

"I used to sometimes have to work on alternators and generators. Sometimes they'd jack up a truck and I'd have to get under there and take out a part. I had a rough time seeing where the part was, and since I found it I had to use my eye-hand coordination to take the part out. I had to find the right size crescent wrench, then get it on the thing and turn it the right way. It'd take a long time, and they would make me stay under the truck until I got it done. Sometimes I couldn't do it.

"When I had to deliver batteries, I had a 1 1/2 ton truck. I'd have to deliver these batteries all over Denver and I'd get lost. I had to go to the gas station and say, 'How do you get to this street?' Or I would have to just keep on going until I found someone who knew where it was. I had a hard time driving the truck. I couldn't tell how far away the cars behind me were. To back the truck up, once I found the place, usually I scraped the side of the building.

"I got fired three weeks later. That job gave me too many problems! More than even I could compensate for!"

Gale Bell, President of Association of Learning Disabled Adults, a self-help group in Washington, D.C., described how her auditory problems affected her job as a secretary:

"My supervisor was upset because he did not like the fact that people I worked for had to repeat instructions several times. One of my bosses asked me to take notes at a meeting. I refused to do it. I said that it would be ridiculous for me to take notes. They didn't get angry. They just looked at me as if I

were crazy.

"I was handed a long list of criticisms of my work. It included: (1) took too long to learn how to operate the new mag card typewriter, (2) had trouble getting telephone messages correctly, and (3) had trouble understanding and carrying out directions.

"I quit before I was fired. What made it even more upsetting was that this was the second job where I had to quit for similar reasons."

Perceptual problems have several undesirable effects on the person's work. Some of them are-

Inefficiency. It takes adults with LD longer to do the same tasks as other workers. It is not uncommon for adults with LD to punch out and then return to the work place to complete their tasks.

Errors. Adults with learning disabilities (LD) make mistakes frequently, because they do not see and/or hear correctly the only way to keep from making errors is to be careful and go slowly. This causes inefficiency (problem no. 1).

Accident proneness. Some adults with LD are easily startled. Those with visual perceptual problems often bump into things.

Difficulty with basic academic skills. This includes trouble with making change, filling out an order form, reading instructions, and writing a memo.

Trouble learning a sequence of tasks. Supervisors often report it takes longer to train adults with learning disabilities. Since their handicap is invisible, sometimes unknown even to themselves, no allowance is made for it. Their mistakes are assumed to be their own fault. Robert Schieber, a file clerk, stated that his boss thought he was mixing the files up on purpose, when, in fact, he was

having reversal problems.

Adults with learning disabilities (LD) are often accused of being careless or slow. As they improve, they rarely receive any praise, even though they may triumph after a long struggle. When they speak openly about their handicaps, they are often met with hostility and disbelief. Hal Ewoldt described how one potential employer told him to "Go to a farm and work six months so you can become a man."

Ray Lundgreen was a manager at a grocery store in St. Paul, Minnesota. After fifteen years on the job, he asked his boss for a slight change in hours so he could take classes. His boss asked him why. Here are Mr. Lundgreen's words:

"I was just coming out of the closet, you know, so I told him I was dyslexic. 'What's that?' he said.

'It means I can't read,' I said. He didn't say anything. A few days later, he told me, 'Put on a vest, you're a bagger' (One who puts the customer's groceries into a bag)."

Mr. Lundgreen fought his demotion through the State Human Rights Office of Minnesota.

Many adults with LD find prejudice even when they do not discuss their handicaps. This bias is based on their physical appearance. Chester Poremba, a well-known private practicing psychologist from Denver, Colorado explained, "These people look different. They can look odd. They have mannerisms, posturings, strange physical gestures, things like that. Their intensity is different."

The "odd" appearance is caused by "soft neurological signs". The term refers to a host of things which result from a disorganized central nervous system. Examples include staring,

"Adults with learning disabilities (LD) are often accused of being careless or slow. As they improve, they rarely receive any praise, even though they may triumph after a long struggle."



turning the head instead of moving the eyes, hyper-reaction to stimuli (i.e., looking extremely startled when someone drops a pencil), inability to look at people in the eye, or holding the head tilted.

A twenty-eight-year-old nurse with learning disabilities explained, "It's not a cognitive prejudice they have against you. It's not as if you were black and they were white or you were in a wheelchair. In those cases, they at least know that they are prejudiced. But in this case, you just make them uneasy and they don't know why and you don't know why. They shy away. They won't even try to understand."

Adults with learning disabilities not only have problems with people's reactions to them, but with their inability to react correctly to people. Because their perception is poor, their responses are frequently incorrect. People with visual perceptual problems, for example, would have trouble deciphering the emotions behind facial expressions.

They might not be able to judge the proper distance between people for social conversation. Those with auditory perceptual problems have trouble judging the feelings behind a tone of voice. Many people with auditory problems hear incorrectly, thus replying to the wrong words.

*"...you just make them
uneasy and they
don't know why and
you don't know why.
They shy away."*

Some experts in learning disabilities feel that employers should show more understanding of the employee with this handicap.

Chester Poremba, for example, believes that the employer should adjust the job around a person's strengths and weaknesses. "If a person has problems

reading or writing, don't put him on a job requiring reading or writing. Or you could let him develop compensations. If he has a difficulty with time, don't put him on a job which absolutely requires accuracy. Look at arbitrary rules and regulations that do not really affect output or quality. Do you really have to punch a time clock on the dot? Or why tell someone they have to get a mailing out by noon, if it really won't get mailed out until tomorrow?"

Katherine Tillotson, Chairperson, Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (ACLD) Foundation, stated that the supervisor had to realize that it would take longer to train an LD person but that once they are trained, they are very capable.

This extra attention could be extremely profitable for the employer, since adults with LD have many strong points. They often overcompensate for their handicaps, turning their weaknesses into strengths. Susan Bauman, who did a follow-up study of former students from special education classes for learning disabilities, reported that "As a group, all of the subjects were willing workers, eager to try to follow instructions about completing assigned tasks and meticulous about work attendance."²

Finding ways of coping with their handicaps takes a lot of creativity. Their slightly incorrect perception can lead them to have a slightly different point of view which can help solve problems. One man with LD, with a twinkle in his eye, said, "I got so good at covering up my errors, that I now have a real talent for whitewashing mistakes, whether they're mine or my immediate supervisor's."

Hal Ewoldt, after long years of "being fired and turned down", is presently

representing people with disabilities in regards to their employment and training needs to the State of Colorado. He counsels disabled people, attends conferences, and gives speeches.

"I communicate well with people," he stated. "I think I have a sincere feeling for any type of handicapped person. I show them that I can work in a professional situation. Just give me the right chance and let me use my strong points and work around my weak points." Hal still has problems filling out forms and writing letters. "They have to rewrite my letters sometimes, change my sentence structure, make it more grammatical. It's very helpful, but I'm sure it's time-consuming for both my supervisors."

*"...the employer
should adjust
the job around
a person's strengths
and weaknesses."*

Ray Lundgreen, the demoted grocery store manager, began a referral service for adults and children with learning disabilities. He held meetings of adults with LD for Minnesota Association for Children with Learning Disabilities.

All over the country, adults with LD are forming self-help groups to advocate for their rights and to share coping skills.

Dian Ridenour explained, "The self-help groups can help LD adults with job problems. If there are a few good leaders, they can help the LD people look at the alternatives realistically. They can help people with their self-esteem. A lot of these people think they

can't do anything.

"We LD people have to know our strengths and weaknesses realistically. I don't mean some psychologist telling us we can or can't do something. If that were the case, I wouldn't have gotten past sixth grade. We have to know our strong points so we can find a job that uses them.

"Some of us have to look at alternatives to regular employment, for example, self-employment. If you can get into the arts, it might be a good idea to do that. Small-scale farming can be good for some people with learning disabilities.

"We share good coping mechanisms at every meeting. At our last one, someone suggested that a person with an auditory sequencing problem ask her supervisor to put instructions in writing. Another person suggested that we trade jobs we can't do for ones we can do. Her coworker was very shy. So she offered to make all of the phone calls for her, in return for her coworker's doing the math on her invoices, which she couldn't do because of her reversal problems."

Successful LD adults must analyze their strengths. They must convince

someone to hire them. Once on the job, they must find some way around their handicaps and convince their coworkers and supervisors to help them with tasks that they find difficult.

Many LD adults succeed through their own determination, intelligence, and creativity. Many find people such as Chester Poremba and Katherine Tillotson to assist them. Others join or organize self-help groups to share experiences and coping mechanisms.

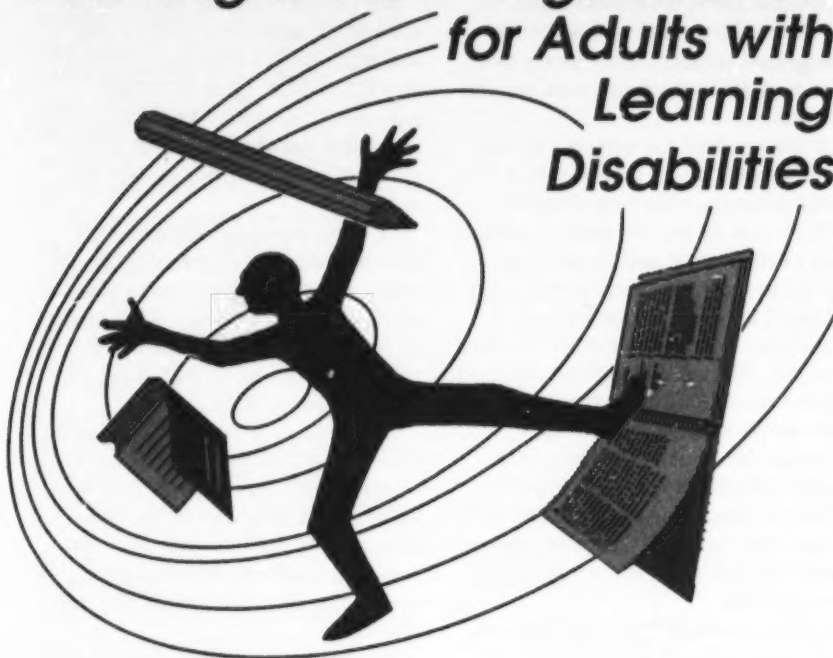
-Dale Brown

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Dale Brown is a learning disabled adult. She works for the President's Committee on Employment of People With Disabilities as an Employment Advisor.

Forming a New Organization for Adults with Learning Disabilities



IMAGINE LIVING IN A

world where nothing is stable. Where the space between your body and other objects is not clearly perceived, and the message your brain sends your limbs never quite manifests itself in the proper action. A world where even the act of walking requires immense concentration because the floor seems to shift under your feet.

The simplest act—holding a pencil, exerting the proper pressure to produce a legible impression without breaking the point, reading a sign, finding your way back to a previous location—are incredibly difficult.

What is this? A simulation of the free-fall conditions in a space capsule? The temporary effect of some mind-altering

chemical?

No. These are just a few of the manifestations of a widespread, but often unacknowledged, invisible disability. Invisible because, unlike paralysis or blindness or cerebral palsy, it doesn't show. Unacknowledged because, according to many professionals, it's something you outgrow. Thousands of people—how many no one knows for sure—know differently. They are adults with learning disabilities.

"Learning disabilities," you may think. "I've heard of that Dys...dyslexia—that has something to do with reading problems. They have special classes for children with that problem, don't they?"

The answer is yes, but a qualified yes. There are some classes for children with

dyslexia, but in the schools many children slip through without being diagnosed properly. They are the slow learners, the unrewarding students who scrape by.

In the words of one woman, "When I was growing up, no one knew there was such a thing as a learning disability.

There were no tests-no tutors. I was a very poor student, and passed from grade to grade only because the county where I lived had no grading system."

Another woman says that she "worked her butt off for C's in high-school," and that it wasn't until she started analyzing her low production rate, during a college work study experience in an electronics factory, that she began to find the clue. Many of the mistakes she made were hearing-related, she discovered; but tests showed that her hearing was normal.

Then a counselor recommended that she read a book on brain injured children. "Something clicked," says Dale Brown, "I realized there was something wrong with me, that I wasn't neurotic or crazy, that I was coping with a very real handicap."

Dale Brown has multiple learning disabilities. She knows about isolation, the feeling of being different. As a child she had to work at what was easy play for other children.

To learn to jump rope, she had to analyze what was involved, then practice and more practice, at first laying a rope on the ground and deliberately jumping from one side to another. It took her five years to get her driver's license.

More specifically, her problems include difficulty hearing conversation over background noise and trouble with motor planning-it's hard for her brain to tell her body what to do.

"But I could read," she says, "so the schools just assumed I wasn't trying, and pretty much left me alone. Now I do my best thinking on an electric typewriter." At age 24, her handwriting resembled that of a child. That it was still a laborious, difficult activity was apparent.

Out of her own experience, in 1978, Brown founded an organization to give others with similar handicaps a place to meet, to find out that they're not unique and alone, to share triumphs-like the man who's learning to read at age 29-and to exchange skills.

"Our handicap is invisible," explained Brown. "Two people in wheelchairs can recognize each other and see their similarities. Deaf people speak the same language and can find each other that way. But, unless we formed a group, we could never find other people like ourselves."

One of the major lessons adults with learning disabilities have to teach each other is self-confidence and self-esteem. Brown has given this a great deal of thought.

Usually vivacious, she becomes almost solemn as she tries to explain: "Learning disabilities are a serious matter, not just a minor handicap. A major problem is that you so rarely get positive feedback as you advance-partly because it's an invisible handicap.

"We need respect when we do succeed in overcoming some part of our handicap, not scorn for having trouble, in the first place. That's why it's so important to have a good public education program. If we can do that, it will be easier for people to come out and admit they are learning disabled."

Because learning disabilities have received so little attention, there are a lot of misconceptions to correct.

Learning disabled adults are not ... mentally retarded ... lazy ... not trying hard enough ... or apt to be criminals.

This last makes Brown laugh. She says, "If there's a higher proportion of learning disabled people in jail, it's because we're the ones most likely to get caught. Have you ever considered how much perceptual coordination it takes to pull off something as simple as shoplifting?"

Gale Bell, a woman in her 30's with a background in the fine arts, responds to others' reaction to her learning disability: "Most people haven't the faintest idea what I'm talking about. They often have a blank, frightened, or belligerent look as I try to explain. Either they change the subject at first opportunity-like in the middle of what I'm saying-or they deny that the problem exists, or make a joke."

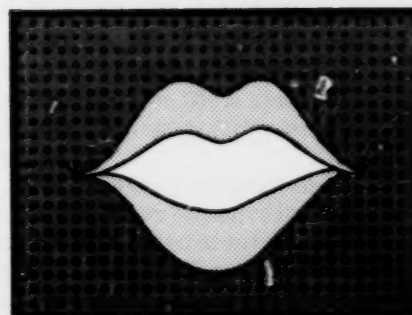
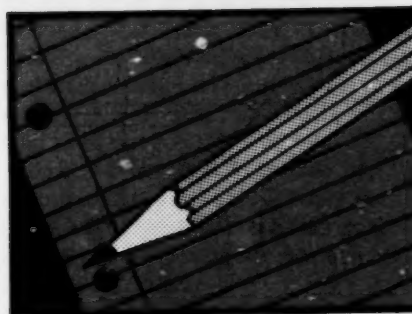
Brown reports that people have said to her, "Gee, you seem so intelligent-you don't look handicapped."

"This is why I'd like to see more awareness of individual differences, as well as of learning disabilities. The worst cross we have to bear is that learning disabilities get confused with personal weaknesses. You see, no one has perfect perception all the time.

"If you're upset and preoccupied and don't see your car keys in plain sight on the desk when you're looking for them, that's a temporary learning disability. Because you can concentrate harder and get it under control, you're liable to think the person with a learning disability is 'just not trying'."

What the general public doesn't realize is the range of problems (which can have differing degrees of severity and most likely are of genetic or neurological origin) which occur for each person with a learning disability.

*One of the major
lessons adults with
learning disabilities
have to teach
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and self-esteem."*



In addition to dyslexia (inability to read due to a medical reason), there are dyscalculia (inability to do arithmetic), dysgraphia (inability to write), and dysphasia (impairment of the ability to speak or sometimes to understand language).

Also, there are difficulties with figure-ground perception (picking out an object from a background of competing objects), visual discrimination (telling the difference in objects), and the visual-spatial perception (seeing things in the right order).

The visual difficulties have analogous hearing problems: Auditory figure-ground perception (hearing one sound against a background noise), auditory discrimination (differentiating between similar sounds like 19 and 90), and auditory sequencing (hearing sounds in the correct order).

Another way to categorize the problems of learning disability is in terms of three little-known senses that can be involved, in addition to seeing and hearing. The first of these senses involves the vestibular sense. This provides a sense of balance, left and right, and is one's "anchor to the world." Something taken for granted by the "normal" person, a dysfunction here produces insecurity because the person doesn't know where he or she is.

The second sense involves the proprioceptor, a sensory receptor which connects the limbs to the brain through nerve endings in the joints. This sense determines how you know where you are in space. When it's off, clumsiness is a result, as is difficult in motor planning.

The third sense involves the sense of touch. If this tactile sense is disturbed, there can be trouble with such activities as holding a pencil, turning the pages of



a book, or knowing how hard to press with a pen.

It was with this knowledge that Dale Brown set about forming an organization that would become a self-help network for learning disabled adults. When asked how she did it, she explained the steps that enabled her group to get substantial media coverage and enlarge from three people to more than 40 in just a few months.

"The first thing we did was establish a network. I called all the professionals I could find in the field of learning disability—who work mostly with children because adults are supposed to outgrow it—and asked them to refer any learning disabled adults they came in contact

with to me.

"At the end of each call, I asked who else should know about our plans. I followed up each call with a letter, thanking the person for his or her time, giving each more information on The Association of Learning Disabled Adults (ALDA) and asking each to tell others about us. When I started getting the same names over and over, I knew the network was pretty well established.

"Part of the process was making contact with the appropriate parents' organization. In our case this was the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (ACLD). It was very important to make friends with this group and to establish that we were their partners, not the subordinates. I sought their cooperation, and did favors for them.

"After we'd make a lot of speeches to parents, some of them came forward and admitted their own learning disabilities. They realized that they didn't have to be ashamed because they hadn't outgrown them.

"The next major step was publicity. We sent out press releases and talked to anybody who would listen. Out of this came two good newspaper stories, which brought more people to us.

"As a result of all this, there were 16 people at our first meeting five weeks later. These people formed our core group.

"The last thing we did in establishing our self-help group was to define the group's responsibilities. I told the professionals I talked with that 'we want people who can give as well as receive from a group situation.' Now we tell our members: 'This group can only do so much. We can't be everything to everybody, we have to be very clear about what we can do.'

"And we needed lots of support when we were getting started-people with the same disability, and good friends who were committed to the idea. The first month or so was really rough. But, it's easier to keep going when you know you have people with you."

Within six months of the initial press release which started ALDA, Brown had a functioning organization with a board of directors and a professional advisory committee. Today, in 1989, the group still exists with Gale Bell as President. It serves as a national model of a self-help group for other groups in the country to emulate. There are regular open meetings-for adults with learning disabilities and other interested people-that feature background information and talks by LD adults on how they've coped with their disability.

Topics have included: What are our handicaps? How have we overcome them? How do they affect us at work? How do they affect our emotions? How did they affect our childhoods? What are the advantages of being learning disabled? Why do so many famous people have learning disabilities?

Intermittently there are closed meetings, more like rap sessions, for adults with learning disabilities only.

Some of the members have stayed in the group since its inception. At least six members have found jobs and are now doing well. Others are still having problems and the group works with them to cope. At a recent meeting, four learning disabled artists shared their experiences with the group. One man, is a sculptor, described how he had put together a table backwards because of his learning disabilities. He carefully took it apart and put it together again correctly, this time. Usually, in these situation, adults with learning disabili-

ties are criticized for having trouble in the first place. In this case, the group validated his discipline and determination.

Brown, along with many other adults with learning disabilities, became active nationally by using the same networking process which began ALDA.

Interestingly enough, one organization, which began in a 1980 meeting at the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped (now called President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities) is called the National Network of Learning Disabled Adults (NNLDA).

*"...we have fun.
We share ideas.
And we form
relationships that
can pull us through
some of the
rough spots."*

The National Network of Learning Disabled adults coordinates the many local self-help groups, keeps a list of them, brings together individuals who wish to organize groups in various areas, and meets each year in a general assembly of learning disabled adults which democratically runs the organization.

According to Bill Butler, Newsletter Editor and Past-President of the organization, "through NNLDA, we have shown professionals that learning disabled people can organize and direct their own group. We have been featured in *Glamour Magazine* and *Psychology Today*. We have succeeded (with other groups) in persuading the Rehabilitation

Services Administration to include learning disabilities as a severe handicap. We bring together people with like difficulties, such as two social workers with learning disabilities who are trying to take their certification examinations untimed. But more important than the friendships we have formed for ourselves, we have fun. We share ideas. And we form relationships that can pull us through some of the rough spots."

The backbone of the learning disabled adult movement exists in the cities, towns, and countryside in locally-based groups such as ALDA, which mean a great deal to people who've dealt with their handicaps, often alone, since childhood. Mike Isard, a founding member of ALDA, now a sales representative for The Keebler Company, a manufacturer of cookies and crackers explains, "Everybody feels a part of the group. It's a comfortable atmosphere where people feel free to talk things out and express their point of view. We enjoy each other's company: That's the most important thing."

As the networking around the country continues, more people will be able to say with Patrick Lee, another long time member, "We're not losers. We're winners. We're just a bit different. We're just looking to be accepted as we are."

With ALDA there to help, that should be a lot easier.-Lynn Park

Ms. Park was on the Communications Staff of the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped when this article was written in 1980. It has been minimally edited to be up-to-date for publication in this pamphlet.

For more information on Association of Learning Disabled Adults, write or send a cassette tape to:

Association of Learning Disabled Adults, P.O. Box 9722, Friendship Station, Washington, DC 20016.

Resources for Learning Disabled People

Learning More About Learning Disabilities

This publication is just a beginning in the many facts to be discovered about learning disabilities. The more you find out, the better you can cope. Here are a few sources of free information:

- **Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities, 4156 Library Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15234** is an organization of parents, professionals, and people with learning disabilities. They will be happy to send you a publications list, membership information, and a copy of *Newsbriefs*, their newsletter. They will also put you in touch with your local chapter, which is a valuable source of information and people interested in the field.

- **President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Washington, D.C. 20036** is a government agency which seeks to increase employment among all people with disabilities through conferences, publications, and policy development. Its learning disabilities program includes this publication and a

"Pathways to Employment" conference which will bring together leadership in the field of employment of people with learning disabilities.

- **Higher Education and Adult Training for people with Handicaps (HEATH) Resource Center, American Council on Education, 1 Dupont Circle, Washington, D.C. 20036-1193**, distributes "Resources for Adults with Learning Disabilities," a fact sheet, and "Getting Ready," a checklist for parents on assuring that their children are ready for work. They also can be called toll free on 800-54-HEATH.

- **National Information Center for Children and Youth with Handicaps, Box 1492, Washington, D.C. 20013**, has a packet of material about learning disabilities. This information includes: a state resource sheet, a list of toll-free numbers, a fact sheet on learning disabilities, the *NICHCY News Digest*, and information on associations and organizations serving people with learning disabilities. In response to more complicated questions, requests for information are researched and answered individually.

- **Foundation for Children with Learning Disabilities** co-sponsored a conference on vocational options for youth with learning disabilities in New

York State. Last year's grants were focused on adolescents and adults with learning disabilities. For proceedings of the conference or more information, write: Foundation for Children with Learning Disabilities, 99 Park Avenue, Sixth Floor, New York City, NY 10016.

Recorded Book Program

For people who can't read, taped books can substitute for written ones. Lectures also can be taped. Individuals with dyslexia are eligible for two recorded book programs:

- **Recording for the Blind (RFB)**, 20 Roszel Road, Princeton, NJ 08540 is a national nonprofit service organization which supplies recorded educational books to individuals who cannot read standard print materials. A registration fee of \$25.00 is required of new applicants. For people with learning disabilities, the application procedures include detailed requirements for testing which must contain a diagnosis of substantial reading disability. Testing must have been completed within the past three years, and a qualified professional must sign the application.

- **National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, The Library of Congress, Washing-**

ton D.C. 20542 (202) 707-5100. To use this service, you must have a "reading disability due to organic dysfunction of sufficient severity to prevent reading standard printed material in a normal manner." This dysfunction must be certified by a medical doctor to prove eligibility. Check with your State library for blind and physically handicapped about applying.

Self-help groups

All over the country, adults who have learning disabilities are joining together to discuss mutual problems, share information, and inform the public about learning disabilities through advocacy and other outreach methods. Since the handicap is invisible, people with learning disabilities can identify themselves only by talking about their disabilities. The national efforts in this direction are:

- **The Youth and Adult Section of the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (ACLD)** has three major goals: (1) to increase awareness of the strengths and needs of people with learning disabilities, (2) to provide a vehicle for persons with learning disabilities to give peer support, and (3) to serve as an advocate

for the general welfare of all individuals with learning disabilities. Many state and local affiliated groups are scattered throughout the country. For more information, contact: Youth and Adult Section, ACLD, 4156 Library Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15234, (412) 341-1515.

• **The National Network of Learning Disabled Adults** is a clearinghouse that adults with learning disabilities can use to locate each other in their communities. On a national level, it will help people with similar problems exchange experiences and ideas. For more information, send your name and address to: **National Network of Learning Disabled Adults, 808 N. 82nd Street, No. F2, Scottsdale, AZ 85256.**

Professional Resources

Self-help, as described in this pamphlet, is not possible for all learning disabled adults. Many people with learning disabilities have such severe disabilities that particular resources and training are necessary. Others need help in dealing with the emotional effects of family and school reactions to their problems.

• **Therapy.** Whoever treats you must know about your learning disabilities

and be able to help you understand their impact on your life. How can you find such a therapist? Professionals are best found through referrals. If you were diagnosed, ask the person who tested you to recommend someone. Ask your local chapter of Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities. You may also find a qualified person through the American Psychiatric Association or American Psychological Association, but be sure the individual has an understanding of learning disabilities or has successfully worked with other learning disabled people. Therapy, in the hands of a skilled professional, has helped many people be proud of overcoming their handicaps rather than ashamed of having them.

• **Goodwill Industries of America, Inc.** is implementing a two-year national pilot project with the Literacy Volunteers of America. Trained volunteers are providing work place literacy skills to clients in four sheltered workshops located all over the country. These clients are functioning at a fifth grade reading level or below. The curriculum will be individualized. for more information write: **Goodwill Industries of America, Inc., 9200 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814-3896.**